

Statement on the Promise of the No Child Left Behind Act
Senator Edward M. Kennedy
10:00 am, Cannon Room 340
July 18, 2003

We are at a crossroads on education. The improvement needs of schools are widespread and deep. We have created a workable school reform plan in the No Child Left Behind Act. The question is whether we will fund the Act and live up to its promise – or walk away from public education.

Too often, student achievement is needlessly low. 37% of 4th graders cannot read at a “basic level” and 68% are not “proficient” readers. Over the last 25 years, average reading scores across all grades have not improved. Our 8th graders rank lower than students in 17 other countries in math and science achievement.

A persistent achievement gap exists for African-American and Latino students. The gap narrowed in the 1970s and 1980s, but it has not improved since then, and it has grown in some communities.

Public schools are desperate for resources. \$127 billion in school construction and repair needs are not being met. Over 50,000 uncertified, untrained, unqualified teachers are teaching in America’s classrooms. Schools serving low-income and minority students are four to five times more likely than other schools to have unqualified teachers.

Appalling disparities exist in school finance. The difference in school funding between Virginia’s Arlington and Hanover counties, for example, is \$200,000 per classroom. A six year old in Arlington County can look forward to over \$2 million more in public education services than a six year old growing up in Hanover County.

Bipartisan NCLB Compromise

Two years ago, President Bush agreed with us that our schools needed major reform *and* should get the resources necessary to do the job right. Many of us believed that reforming

schools on a shoestring budget could not possibly succeed, and many others felt that throwing more resources at schools without reform would be a waste of money. In the No Child Left Behind Act, we reached a clear agreement on specific resources for specific reforms.

We raised academic standards for all students. We required a fully qualified teacher in every classroom within four years. We provided for *quality, diagnostic* testing of students in grades 3 through 8, in order to identify learning needs early – to tell parents how their children were doing individually and in comparison to their peers – and to hold schools accountable for the performance of *all* children.

We agreed to provide funds for supplemental services and after-school training for children. We agreed to an unprecedented targeting of resources on the neediest children in the neediest areas.

We achieved agreement on these reforms, because we promised resources for these reforms. In fact, we did not complete action on the legislation until the clear promise of resources was obtained. Unfortunately, what is now clear is that the promise of resources is being broken.

In the Senate, we will soon act on the education funding bill, based on an overall budget crafted solely by Republicans. Shamefully, it contains a litany of broken promises on education. We intend to fight to improve it, and to ask our colleagues to vote on specific issues to fulfill the promises of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Broken Promises for Education Funding

- * In January 2002, President Bush promised that “America’s schools will be on a new path of reform . . . our schools will have greater resources to meet those goals.”

But the Senate Republican education bill cuts funding for the No Child Left Behind Act by \$200 million. We have raised standards and raised expectations on students. We pledged to hold schools accountable for better performance. Yet now, the Republican majority wants to reduce funding for school reform.

- * President Bush promised that we would “leave no child behind,” and that became the title of the landmark school reform bill he signed into law a year and a half ago.

But the Senate Republican education funding bill will leave 6 million children behind. It underfunds the Title I program for needy children by over \$6 billion. 6 million needy children will not get smaller classes, will not get supplemental services, and will not get the special attention they need to meet high standards in reading and mathematics.

- * In March last year, President Bush promised to support teachers, making sure, he said, that they would “get the training they need to raise educational standards.”

But the Senate education bill will cut 20,000 teachers from professional development programs. It **completely eliminates training for teachers in technology.** We need to upgrade teacher quality, not downgrade it. The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to give every classroom a high quality teacher. They need more resources, not fewer resources, to reach that goal.

- * President Bush promised that his Administration “will promote policies that expand educational opportunities for Americans from all racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.”

But the Senate Republican education bill cuts 32,000 children from English as a Second Language education programs.

It cuts 40 percent of funding for children of migrant workers trying to obtain their GED and go to college.

It eliminates funding for dropout prevention, at a time when Latino students are seven times more likely to drop out of school than white students.

And for the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the Supreme Court, the Senate Republican bill eliminates the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship program.

They want to end Head Start as we know it, and turn it into a block grant. They want to turn Head Start into “Slow Start” or “No Start” for needy children.

The Senate Republican education bill provides zero increase in college aid for needy families or hard-pressed, middle-income families. It provides zero increase in Pell grants, zero increase in college loans, and zero increase in work study.

For the first time in eight years, the Senate bill is lower than the House bill on education. The House Republican Education bill falls short by over \$8 billion on the funds needed to fully carry out the No Child Left Behind Act, but the Senate bill is even worse. It actually reduces funds for the No Child Left Behind Act.

Senate Amendments and Conclusion

Democrats intend to do all they can to remedy these injustices in the Senate bill. Under Senator Byrd's leadership, we will offer an amendment to fully fund Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act. We will fight to bring school reform to 2 million additional needy children. Senator Harry Reid and Senator Bingaman will fight to increase education aid to Hispanic children. Senator Dodd and Senator Jeffords will fight to fully fund special education under IDEA.

When we say "no child left behind," we mean no needy child -- no Hispanic child, no African American child, no special needs child. Few things are more callous than knowingly, willingly, and deliberately breaking a promise to a child.

We know that some in Congress on the right wing will try to defeat these amendments and walk away from public schools. They want to abolish the Department of Education, and see public schools fail. They want to use private school vouchers to undermine public schools.

But the vast majority of the public and of thoughtful experts reject those views. They want more resources for reform and improvement in public schools. They want the President and the Congress to live up to the promise we made to leave no child behind.

It is time to live up to our promise of resources for reform. I know others here will support us, and welcome your support and your votes.